The ENVIRONMENTAL BULLETIN from the Savannah River Site

DWPF fills canister 150

The Defense Waste Processing Facility, which transforms high level liquid radioactive waste into a glass form, poured on September 10 the 150th canister of waste since last October.

The milestone meets the Department of Energy's (DOE) goal for canister production in the current fiscal year, which ended September 30.

Since the first-of-its-kind facility began radioactive operations in March 1996, more than 214 canisters have been poured.

New nuclear materials packaging technique

SRS employees of FB-Line recently began operation of a new nuclear material packaging technique -- bagless transfer. Developed in-house by Savannah River Technology Center and Nuclear Materials Stabilization and Storage Division employees, bagless transfer packages plutonium metal inside a welded, stainless steel can for safe storage up to 50 years.

Plutonium is a radioactive element that is used in nuclear weapons and as a reactor fuel. SRS's separations facilities, such as FB-Line, convert plutonium solutions to a metallic form suitable for safe storage.

The term "bagless" describes a system that packages plutonium metal without any plastic material. In the previous packaging technique, the plutonium metal was placed in a plastic bag and sealed in a tin can -- similar to cans used in food packaging. This can was suitable for storing plutonium five to 10 years. Elimination of plastic bags removes the possibility of chemical reactions that could happen once plastic "breaks down" over time.

The bagless can is stainless steel, corrosion resistant and is backfilled with helium once the plutonium metal (without plastic) is placed inside. Then, the can is welded.

In the future, FB-Line will package all plutonium metal through bagless transfer. Materials, such as plutonium oxide, will be packaged in a similar process and stored in the Actinide Packaging and Storage Facility, projected to start up in 2001.

In this issue ...

Removal actions at SRS seepage basins

The Department of Energy (DOE) began vegetation removal actions at Savannah River Site's (SRS) seepage basins at C Reactor and at the Savannah River Technology Center's (SRTC). The DOE decided to initiate time critical removal actions to remove and dispose of contaminated vegetation from these basins.

Removal actions include removing larger trees, vines and bushes. Disposition of the cut vegetation will be determined by DOE, the Environmental Protection Agency and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. Completion of these actions will remove the source of contamination for the local wildlife and prevent spread of contaminated leaves in the fall.

The C Reactor seepage basin was used to collect low-level radioactive wastewater from the C Reactor disassembly basin. The SRTC seepage basins were constructed in the 1950s to collect low-level radioactive wastewater from the former Savannah River Laboratory.

Removal Site Evaluation Reports, completed under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, detail how these removal actions are being completed and are available for public review beginning September 24 at the information repositories listed in the box below.

Design changes, TNX groundwater unit

An Explanation of Significant Differences (ESD) is being issued by the Department of Energy (DOE) to announce changes in the remedial design selected for the TNX Area Operable Unit. SRS is required by the Comprehensive Environmental Response to provide an explanation of the differences and to make the information available to the public.

The TNX Area is a pilot-scale test facility used to provide technical support to various SRS production areas. Past operations within the TNX area led to contamination of the area's groundwater with solvents and metals. The selected remedy in the Interim Record of Decision (IROD, October 1994) was to use one recirculation well and a pump and treat the system consisting of four extraction wells and an air stripper. After operations started, testing showed that the recirculation well was not operating as designed, was not effective in removing contaminants and could not be made effective. Therefore, the recirculation well was shut down and will not be used as part of the interim action.

The only change in the remedy as stated in the IROD and the currently proposed remedy is to discontinue the operation of the recirculation well. This ESD will be available for public review October 16 to November 14 at the information repositories listed in the box below.

Citizens board seeks new members

The Savannah River Site's Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) membership campaign is September 22 through November 21.

Area citizens and SRS employees may apply. Up to five SRS employees can serve on the board; however, applications will not be accepted from management employees or employees of departments directly impacted by board recommendations. Spouses and children of these employees also are not eligible for board membership.

The 25-member SRS CAB consists of half its members from South Carolina and the other from Georgia. The board advises on issues related to environmental restoration, waste management, risk management and future use and nuclear materials management.

For more information or to request a membership packet, call Dawn Haygood at SRS, (803) 952-6971. Area citizens may call toll free, 1 (800) 249-8155. Applications are also available on the CAB Web Page at www.srs.gov/general/people/srs-cab.

INFORMATION REPOSITORIES

* DOE Public Reading Room, Gregg-Graniteville Library, USC-Aiken * Thomas Cooper Library Government Documents Department, USC-Columbia * Reese Library, Augusta State University, Augusta, Ga. * Asa H. Gordon Library, Savannah State University, Savannah, Ga.

SRS Home Page, "What's New" (http://www.srs.gov)
SRS Environmental Restoration Home Page
(http://www.srs.gov/general/sci-tech/enviro-rest/extpage/pub/pubinv.html)

Current NEPA actions affecting SRS

• Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (DOE/EIS-0026-52)	The final EIS will be issued in October 1997.
• Rocky Flats Plutonium Residues and Scrub Alloy (DOE/EIS-0277)	The draft EIS Notice of Availability is scheduled for October 1997.
• Shutdown of River Water System at SRS (DOE/EIS-0268)	The final EIS was issued May 1997, and the ROD is expected fourth quarter 1997.
• Accelerator for Production of Tritium (DOE/EIS-0270)	Preparation of the draft EIS continues with a proposed issue date of November 1997.
• Tritium Extraction Facility (DOE/EIS-0271)	Publication of the draft EIS is projected for February 1998 and final EIS and ROD for August 1998.
• DOE Waste Management (DOE/EIS-0200)	Multiple RODs will be issued: TRU/HLW in November 1997, HLW storage in December 1997, LLW and LLMW in June 1998.
• SRS Spent Nuclear Fuel (DOE/EIS-0279)	Preparation of the draft EIS is progressing with a publication date in the fourth quarter 1997.
• Surplus Plutonium Disposition (DOE/EIS-0282)	The draft EIS is scheduled for February 1998.
• Wetland Mitigation Bank Program (DOE/EA-1205)	Preparation of the draft EA is progressing with a proposed issue date of December 1997.
• Tritium Facility Modernization/Consolidation Project (DOE/EA-1222)	Preparation of the draft EA is ongoing with a proposed issue date of October 30, 1997.
• DOE Permission for Off-loading and Transportation of Commercial Low-Level Radioactive Waste across SRS (DOE/EA-1218)	The predecisional draft EA was sent to South Carolina and Georgia on August 26, 1997, for review and comment.
• Privatization of the Multi-Purpose Pilot Plant Project Campus (formerly TNX) (DOE/EA-0000)	Preparation of the draft EA is progressing with a proposed issue date of November 1997.

Operation of BaroBall check-valves

The U.S. Department of Energy-Savannah River Operations Office has requested from the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) a temporary authorization for the operation of up to 20 barometric pumping wells using BaroBall check-valves.

These check-valves will be located in the vicinity of the Metallurgical Laboratory Hazardous Waste Management Facility in the A/M area of the Savannah River Site (SRS).

Past operations in the area near the facility resulted in releases of solvents to the ground. Migration of these solvents has resulted in contamination of soil and groundwater. This technology was selected, because it can be rapidly implemented and installed, requires minimal operation and maintenance, and is cost-effective.

SRS has requested the term of the temporary authorization for the maximum allowable 180 days. More information is available by contacting personnel listed in the bottom box.

For copies of NEPA documents, contact ...

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For more information on this or other cleanup and compliance activities at SRS, please contact:

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